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RESEARCH IN COHESIVE AND DISRUPTIVE TENDENCIES
IN COALITION-TYPE GROUPS

Technical Report Number 1

PERCEIVED CONTROL AND INTERDEPENDENCE AS RELATED TO MEMBER
ATTITUDES TOWARD A COALITION-TYPE GROUP¹

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Just as individuals form a group or organization, so groups organize as an association, federation, or coalition. There seem to be similarities as well as differences between groups of individuals and groups composed of member-groups. When an individual becomes a member of a group he sometimes has to subordinate his own personal goals to those of the group. Similarly, a member-group of a coalition may have to subordinate its goals.

Among the differences between a group and a coalition is the greater accessibility of the members of the group to face-to-face influence. The coalition usually functions by means of representatives in direct contact with one another. Frequently, they not only represent their group in the coalition but, reciprocally, they represent the coalition to their group.

The greater distance between the members of the component groups and the coalition itself creates problems of group functioning which while not absent in simple face-to-face groups, are highlighted in coalition-type groups.

The problem of this study was to determine what factors are associated with the perception by a member-group of benefit accruing from participation in a coalition. It should be noted that while the dependent variable is called "perceived benefit", it could probably be coordinated to a conceptual notion such as cohesiveness - i.e., the strength of attraction to the group.⁽²⁾ The research was guided by two hypotheses. The first was that perception of benefit is a function of the degree to which the member-group has power within or controls the decisions of the coalition. The rationale for this hypothesis involves the consideration that any given proposal to be decided upon is unlikely to be equally advantageous to all groups. Those groups possessing the power or influence to control the outcome of the decision will be satisfied more often with the coalition's actions and thus perceive more benefit from membership in it.

1. This research was carried out under contract with the Office of Naval Research as one project under Contract N8 onr-66216. It is also a part of a program of research on the social psychology of student groups carried out by the Office of the Dean of Students, University of Minnesota. The writers wish to express their appreciation to B. J. Borreson, Director of the Student Activities Bureau, and Professor E. G. Williamson, Dean of Students, for their consultation at various steps of the study. Robert Holt, David Lewit, and Leonard Swanson worked as research assistants during parts of the study.

A related hypothesis took cognizance of the probability that since the representative occupies the position of the outermost member of his group, in Bavelas' terminology (1), with respect to the coalition, the members' evaluation of their group's control within the coalition would derive from their judgments of his success in that role.

The second hypothesis was based upon the idea of interdependence among groups. The more the members of a group perceive their group is similarly affected when another group benefits or suffers from some environmental event, the greater will be their tendency to join with other groups in action designed to enhance such benefits or reduce such disadvantages. This was the hypothesis with which the research began. However, to anticipate the results, the hypothesis obtains only under special conditions. This point will be elaborated later in the paper.

METHOD

Sample

The coalition-type group studied was the Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) at the University of Minnesota, consisting of 32 social fraternities. The actual number of fraternities included in the sample varies for reasons which will be explained shortly. Unlike most coalitions, membership in the IFC is compulsory. The fraternities range in size from 15 to 71 members with a median of 36.

The Council itself consists of one voting representative and his alternate from each fraternity, but the alternates are not included in this study. The Council is led by an executive committee composed of four officers and three committee chairmen who are usually elected from among the previous year's representatives. The Council meets every other week to legislate upon matters that affect the local fraternities as a whole. It exercises control over certain internal and external affairs. Internal affairs consist most importantly of the regulation of methods of recruitment, pledging, and initiation of members. In a real sense, the IFC is a regulator of competition. Included among other internal affairs are social events and financial matters.

Externally the IFC is oriented toward establishing favorable attitudes toward the joining of fraternities and toward improving the reputation of fraternities in general. It also mediates between the fraternities and the University administration in several areas related to University control of student activities.

Since the term "coalition" is usually reserved to denote a combination of groups whose main reason for existence is to act upon the external environment, these latter functions of IFC justify the application of the term in our study. However, the IFC is not a temporary organization and is thus not truly a coalition.

Data Collection

In the exploratory part of the study, 31 of the 32 representatives were interviewed using fixed-question, free-answer items. In addition to information which would assist in constructing a questionnaire to be given later to all the members, sociometric-type data and prestige rankings of the fraternities were obtained. The prestige rankings assigned to each fraternity were averaged to obtain a mean prestige rating.

Data were then obtained from a questionnaire administered to the active members of 26 fraternities during their business meeting. The other six groups either did not cooperate or did not have houses. The median percent return was 86; the interquartile range from 82 to 98; the range 47 to 100.

A year following, another questionnaire was administered to 28 residential counselors (graduate students who live in the fraternities and who represent the University), and a different questionnaire was administered to the new group of 32 representatives to obtain information to help in interpreting some of the results of the first study. Each counselor was asked to rate the competence of the representative from his chapter. The representatives were asked sociometric-type as well as other questions.

The questionnaire given to the fraternity members attempted to measure the variables necessary to test the two main hypotheses and, in addition, other variables which we anticipated might affect the relationships. The items were:

- 1) Perceived benefit. "All in all how much does your fraternity benefit from its association with the IFC?" This was a seven-point scale from "1. A great deal." to "7. We're seriously handicapped."
- 2) Perceived control. "In your opinion, how much say does your fraternity have in IFC decisions?" A three-point scale from "1. More than most.." to "3. Less say than most.." was used.
- 3) Perceived interdependence (a). "When some other fraternity receives bad publicity how does it affect your fraternity?" Five-point scale from "1. It definitely benefits us." to "5. It definitely harms us."
- 4) Perceived interdependence (b). Same question as above except that "good" was substituted for "bad". Same scale also.
- 5) Perceived interdependence (c). "When some other fraternity gets into trouble with the University administration over violations like drinking (without publicity) how does it affect your fraternity?" Same scale as above.
- 6) Competence of leadership as mediator. "How well do you think the present slate of IFC officers will represent the fraternity point-of-view to the University administration?" Four-point scale from "2. They will do a very good job." to "5. They will allow themselves to be too influenced by the University administration." The response, "I don't know anything about the IFC officers." was in the first position, but was not included in the mean scores.
- 7) Importance of representative role. "How important to your chapter do you consider the job of IFC representative?" Five-point scale from "1. Very important." to "5. Not important."
- 8) Competence of representative. "Does your representative seem to have a pretty thorough knowledge of the issues that face the fraternity system?" Four-point scale from "1. Yes, to a large degree." to "4. No."

- 9) Influence attempts of representative. "Does your representative usually attempt to convince the chapter to support a particular position on an issue which will be voted upon by IFC or does he usually just seek out the chapter's opinion?" Three-point scale from "1. He usually attempts to convince the chapter." to "3. He usually just seeks out opinions."
- 10) Participation in fraternity business. "About how many hours per week do you spend in working on fraternity matters?" A six-point scale from "1. None." to "6. Over 12 hours." but reconverting scale points back to the median of the intervals associated with the scale points.
- 11) Membership size. The mean membership of the present and preceding two academic quarters.
- 12) Prestige. The mean rank received when the 31 representatives were asked to rank order the fraternities according to "prestige." The Coefficient of Concordance (3) was used as a measure of internal consistency and turned out to be .57.
- 13) IFC attendance of representative. Taken from official records.
- 14) Counselor's ratings of relative competence and influence of representative within his own fraternity. The ratings of three questions using five-point scales comparing the second group of representatives with other members were totaled: a) Frequency of contribution to meetings independent of IFC reports; b) Weight of his contributions, other than those concerning IFC; c) Ability to speak in a clear and interesting manner.
- 15) The sociometric measures will be described along with the results.

Analysis of Data

Each fraternity was given a score on each item of the fraternity questionnaire which was the mean of the scale points checked by the members of that group. The N therefore is 26. Product-moment correlations were computed using the group means as scores. With 24 d.f., r need be only .39 to be significant at the 5% level and .50 to be significant at the 1% level.

The other analyses are based upon 2x2 frequency tables in which the fraternities are divided into upper and lower halves on at least one of the variables. Chi² or Fisher's exact test for 2x2 tables was used to test significance. Comparisons made by these 2x2 tables are all significant at or beyond the 5% level of confidence.

RESULTS

The relation between control and perceived benefit.

This relationship was established in several ways. First, the correlation between the perceived control item and the perceived benefit item is .69. Thus, the more the members of a fraternity believe they have control over the decisions in IFC the more do they believe they benefit from participating in IFC.

The second approach assumes that officership in the IFC would be considered by an officer's fraternity to be tantamount to having control in IFC. The results, using officership over a two-year period, show that such fraternities do indeed perceive more benefit. Table 1 shows this result clearly. It also supports the assumption that officership leads to perceived control.

Table 1

Officership in IFC (1950-52) and Perceived Benefit and Control

| Officership | <u>Perceived Benefit</u> | | <u>Perceived Control</u> | |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | <u>Upper half</u> | <u>Lower half</u> | <u>Upper half</u> | <u>Lower half</u> |
| Yes | 10 | 0 | 9 | 1 |
| No | 3 | 13 | 4 | 12 |

Not only do the fraternities whose members hold office in IFC perceive benefit and control but they also rank high in prestige. Also, the higher the office the higher the prestige of the officer's fraternity. Table 2 shows this relationship, using a six year period. The significance of the means was not tested directly but a Chi² test of upper and lower halves on prestige versus officership or non-officership is highly significant.

Table 2

Mean Prestige Rank of Fraternities Having Officers
in IFC During 1946-52

| Elected Officers | N | Mean Prestige Rank of Fraternity* |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| President | 7 | 5.1 |
| Vice-President | 7 | 9.7 |
| Treasurer | 7 | 10.9 |
| Secretary | 7 | 11.3 |

* Mean rank of all 32 fraternities is 16.5

Up to now we have considered only officership in IFC as related to perceived benefit and control. But what about the representatives themselves? Is a representative's status within the Council related to his fraternity's evaluation of its control?

In the exploratory interview with the representatives they were asked who were their best friends on the Council exclusive of the executive committee. It is plausible that in such a group those mentioned as 'best friends' will tend to be those who have status and influence in IFC. This assumption is borne out by the high relationship obtained when the 'best friends' measure was related to 'best contributions' nominations on the following year's representatives. Table 3 shows that the representatives from fraternities high in perceived control have more status according to this measure. When the prestige rank of the fraternity is substituted for perceived control, the result is almost identical.

Table 3

Friendship Choices Received by Representatives and
Perceived Control of their Fraternities

| Choices received | <u>Perceived Control</u> | |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | <u>Upper half</u> | <u>Lower half</u> |
| Upper half | 10 | 3 |
| Lower half | 3 | 10 |

An additional implication of this result is that the representatives of fraternities high in perceived control are more involved in the IFC group itself, perhaps in the 'inner circle'. To test this implication the representatives as well as the executive committee of the following year were asked to nominate the 'strongest supporters of IFC'. Since an up-to-date measure of the fraternities' perceived control was not available, the prestige rankings of the previous year were substituted to relate to the nominations. This substitution will be justified shortly. Table 4 shows that the representatives nominated as strong supporters belong almost exclusively to the higher prestige groups.

To obtain a more direct measure of the representative's status within the Council, the following year's representatives were also asked to nominate the members who "... make the best contributions during discussions at IFC meetings." Table 5 shows that the representatives from the higher ranking fraternities in prestige are most influential according to this measure.

Table 4

Nominations Received by Representative as Being Among
Strongest Supporters of IFC and his Fraternity's Prestige

| Nominations Received | <u>Fraternity's Prestige</u> | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <u>Upper half</u> | <u>Lower half</u> |
| One or more | 11 | 1 |
| None | 5 | 15 |

Table 5

Nominations Received by Representative as Making Best Discussion
Contributions during IFC Meetings and his
Fraternity's Prestige

| Nominations Received | <u>Fraternity's Prestige</u> | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <u>Upper half</u> | <u>Lower half</u> |
| One or more | 8 | 2 |
| None | 8 | 14 |

The justification of the use of prestige instead of perceived control in the last two tables rests upon the judgment that prestige would be more stable over the year than perceived control and upon the fact that the two measures correlate .80.

We have now shown a connection between the representative's status within the Council and his fraternity's perception of control in IFC. Do the fraternities who are higher on perceived control perceive their representatives differently from those lower? Table 6 shows that they do tend to rate their representatives as more competent and more active in attempting to influence them on IFC matters. They also regard the office of IFC representative as more important. Other relevant correlations are also shown in this table.

Perception of interdependence.

Before taking up the relations between the measures of perceived interdependence and perceived benefit, a comparison of the three interdependence items themselves will be illuminating. As Table 7 shows, the question concerned with "bad publicity" produces the greatest recognition of interdependence. The sign test is highly significant. In 25 out of 26 fraternities the mean scores on this question exceed those obtained from the question concerned with being disciplined by the University without publicity.

Table 7

Means and S.D.'s of Perceived Interdependence Scales*

| | <u>M</u> | <u>S. D.</u> |
|------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1. Bad Publicity | 4.22 | .25 |
| 2. Disciplined by University | 3.88 | .28 |
| 3. Good Publicity | 2.13 | .26 |

* 1 is benefit and 5 is harmed.

In all 26 fraternities the responses to bad publicity are more extreme than are the responses to good publicity (transposing the mean scores by subtracting from six). The means of the discipline and the good publicity items are practically identical if the latter's scores are properly transposed.

Apparently, the action of the University toward a violation of regulations is perceived as more limited to the violator than are the opinions of the public when a fraternity causes bad publicity. Good publicity is also seen as more limited to the fraternity concerned. In short, fraternities share blame more than they share gain. Since publicity, both good and bad, is received by fraternities and since the fraternities are disciplined by the University, we may regard these questions as having some reality.

As shown in Table 8, all three interdependence measures are significantly related in the expected directions to perceived benefit. However, they are not entirely independent of the perception of control. The correlations between perceived benefit and the interdependence items (partialing out perceived control) are $-.38$, $-.08$, and $.31$ for bad publicity, disciplined by the University, and good publicity respectively. For 23 degrees of freedom an r of $.40$ is significant at the 5% level. Thus, it is possible to maintain, but not with a high degree of confidence, that for the publicity scales, good or bad, perceived interdependence contributes to some extent to perceived benefit.

Table 8

Intercorrelations Among Perceived Benefit, Perceived Control
and Perceived Interdependence

| | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Perceived benefit | .69 | -.57 | -.45 | .44 |
| 2. Perceived control | | -.47 | -.71 | .33 |
| 3. Bad publicity | | | .62 | -.79 |
| 4. Disciplined by University | | | | -.36 |
| 5. Good publicity | | | | |

During the analysis of the data the investigators realized that, theoretically, the recognition of interdependent harm was not a sufficient condition for coalition or for perceiving benefit from coalition. Given a free situation in which one group is hurt by being connected with another, the most probable consequence, theoretically, is for the former to dissociate itself from the latter. Other conditions have to be present to counteract this tendency and to bring about coalition. One such condition is the belief that collective action can accomplish the specific purposes for which the coalition was formed. Given such confidence, then perceived interdependence can be effective as a determiner of the tendency to organize or perceive benefit therefrom. Without this confidence, perceived interdependence should not be effective in this regard.

Fortunately, it was possible to test this hypothesis with respect to the second of the interdependence items. The measure used to establish the conditions of high and low confidence in the coalition's ability to accomplish its purpose was the item labeled, "Competence of leadership as mediator". The 26 fraternities were divided into two halves, those high on this item and those low. Correlations between perceived benefit and the interdependence item of "discipline" were computed separately for the two halves. The results were just as expected. In the high group, the correlation was -.69 and in the low group -.02. A t test shows this difference to be significant at the 8% level of confidence. Thus, the data are consistent with the hypothesis that the more a member-group of a coalition believes that the coalition can accomplish its function of mediating with the source of interdependent harm, the stronger will be the relation between perceived interdependence and perceived benefit.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis is strongly supported in this study that a member-group's perception of control in the coalition and its perception of benefit from the coalition are related. The study has also made plausible the hypothesis that the perception of control strongly depends upon the member-group actually having power or control in the Council. Control is established by means of its representative's influence and status within the Council and the eventual election of such representatives to officership within the Council.

These results by themselves provide little more than documentation for a fairly straight-forward hypothesis. However, they do identify "control" as an important correlate of perceived benefit and they provide us with a starting point to discuss the question of how control in a coalition is achieved by a member-group.

First of all, it will be remembered, perceived control and the prestige of the fraternity among fraternities is highly related ($r = .80$). The membership size of the fraternity and its prestige is also highly related ($r = .79$). Thus, the larger, more visible, prestigious fraternities provide the leadership for and apparently control the Council.

One hypothesis concerning this state-of-affairs for which we have only suggestive evidence is that the smaller, less prestigious groups have all they can do to maintain their own group and its activities and cannot spare their leaders to become actively involved in IFC. There is evidence that the groups with fewer members require more man-hours per member to take care of their activities than do the larger groups. The correlation between the size of the fraternity and the mean number of hours the members report they devote to working on matters related to the fraternity's business is $-.60$. Although the members of the smaller fraternities devote more time to their groups than do the members of the larger groups, the total of the man-hours is less. Another datum consistent with this hypothesis is the finding that the representatives from the smaller fraternities have lower status within their fraternity. The larger fraternities may be able to spare their more capable members for IFC.

Not entirely different from the foregoing interpretation which stresses the economic aspects of the situation is another hypothesis which emphasizes the motivational features of the situation. This hypothesis has two somewhat different aspects. The fraternities compete among themselves in many ways: for members, in sports, in other contests, and, in general, in the attempts to become known on and off campus as a "top fraternity". The IFC may provide just another opportunity for the larger, more prestigious groups to maintain their status among fraternities.

The other aspect of this motivational hypothesis is that the smaller groups do not identify as much as do the larger groups with the fraternity system as a whole. Their representatives' relatively low status within the Council may be a reflection of their fraternities' lack of involvement in and peripheral position among the fraternities as a whole. The interpretation that the smaller, less prestigious groups have low interest in IFC is supported by a correlation of $.50$ between size and the representatives' attendance at meetings, the fact that their relatively lower status members represent them in IFC, and their lower evaluation of the importance of the office of IFC representative.

Neither of these hypotheses can be contradicted by the data, and it is possible that both are correct since it seems plausible that circular causal processes are at work, such as a lack of success in obtaining control leading to reduced efforts to gain control.

The relation of perceived interdependence to member attitudes toward the coalition, while not as clear cut as perceived control, seems to be sufficiently strong to warrant discussion.

We have measured three kinds of perceived interdependence. One is the belief by a member that his group will suffer if there is public condemnation of another similar group. The most plausible interpretation of the meaning this measure has to our subjects is that outsiders condemn all fraternities when only one should be condemned. This is a negatively valent situation for members of fraternities. As a general principle, if one is confronted with a negatively valent region the tendency is either to remove oneself from the region or to remove the source of the negative valence. In the case under consideration, the first alternative would probably be some sort of dissociation from the fraternity responsible for the bad publicity. This is practically impossible under the given physical and social circumstances. One form of the second alternative is to eliminate such a fraternity. For various reasons this method is also unrealistic.

Another form of the second alternative is much more likely, especially when it is realized that publicity is a continuing problem and that any number of fraternities may elicit bad publicity. This method is concerned with the prevention of the occurrence of the negative valence. One common method is control of the relevant actions of all fraternities. Control can be obtained most readily by some form of organization and in our specific case this is the IFC. Thus, we may derive that those groups most sensitive to interdependence with respect to bad publicity will be most in favor of coalition.

What is missing from this formulation, inasmuch as our study is concerned with an already established coalition, is a measure of the degree to which the coalition is regarded as adequately performing its task of control. Even though a fraternity is aware of the consequences of bad publicity, it will not necessarily perceive benefit from the coalition if its members believe IFC is not fulfilling its control function adequately. Probably, the reason why the relation does exist in our study is that by and large the IFC is regarded as doing a good job in this respect.

The second measure of perceived interdependence is also concerned with harm to one's group as the result of another group's being punished, but this time by an authority, i.e. the University administration. Such "harm" is probably to be interpreted as a fear that the authority may withdraw certain privileges from all groups or at least make it more difficult for them to enjoy their privileges. Again, this is a negatively valent type of interdependence, but with an important difference. Control of the fraternities through organization should be a desirable step as before, but now there is the additional possibility of direct dealings with the authority, not only to lessen or delimit the punishment, but also to maintain or gain privileges for fraternities. Thus, if the members of a fraternity believe they will suffer for another group's misdeeds, perception of benefit from IFC will be contingent upon confidence in IFC's ability to ameliorate the situation by mediating with the administration.

Our results are consistent with this interpretation. Among fraternities with relatively high confidence in IFC's mediation ability, those who perceived the most benefit perceived the most interdependence ($r = -.69$). Among fraternities relatively low in confidence there was no such relation ($r = -.02$).

The third measure of interdependence, perception of benefit from another group's obtaining good publicity, is theoretically a reflection of a different psychological situation than the situation described by the first measure, but in this specific study the two are highly related and for plausible reasons. Most of the fraternities in this study seem to be aware that their reputation with certain classes of outsiders is in question. Consequently, the IFC is commissioned to obtain favorable publicity as well as to prevent unfavorable publicity.

The most important contribution of studying the variable of perceived interdependence, in our opinion, is the specification of a condition under which perceived interdependence should affect the tendency to coalesce. It seems probable that these results are also applicable to the problem of group formation among individuals as well as among groups.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study tested two hypotheses concerning the determinants of a member-group's perception of benefit from participation in a coalition-type group. The first hypothesis was that perception of benefit is a function of the degree to which the member-group controls the decisions of the coalition - in more general terms, of its power within the coalition. The second was based upon the idea of interdependence among groups. The more the members of a group perceive their group benefits when another group benefits, or is harmed when another group is harmed, the more will they perceive benefit from the coalition.

The coalition-type group studied was an Inter-Fraternity Council consisting of 32 fraternities and their representatives to the Council. Questionnaires were administered to the fraternity members and to two different groups of representatives.

The results are consistent with the first hypothesis. Fraternities who perceive benefit not only perceive but also have control using the criteria of being represented by members who achieve positions of leadership and status within the Council. The interpretation of these results is given in terms of the relative prestige among fraternities, their resources, and their motivation for participation in the Council.

Consideration of the data led to the specification of a condition for the second hypothesis to be correct. Interdependence of the type in which one group is harmed when another is harmed will be effective as a determiner of perception of benefit only when it is believed that collective action will achieve the purposes it was designed to accomplish. In the absence of this or other conditions, such interdependence, it is argued, may even lead to the disruption of a group.

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